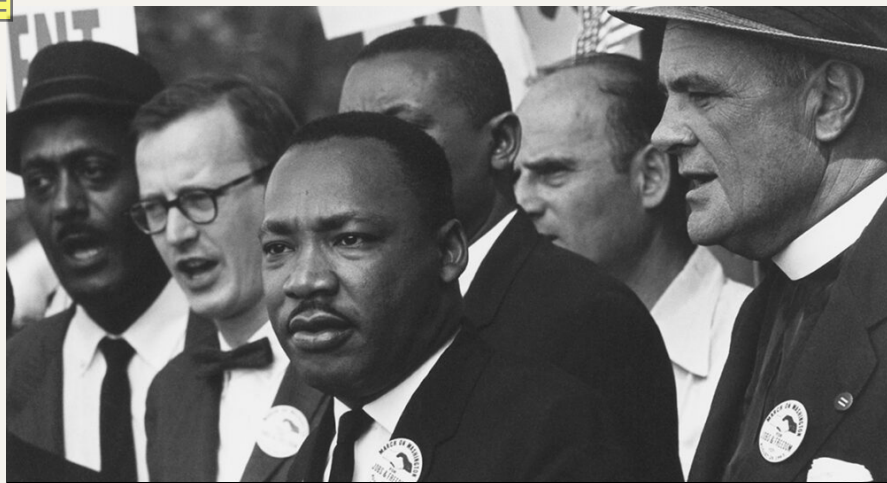




THE SCIENCE OF PERSUASION **RALLY**

September 30, 2025



The Civil Rights Movement



Marriage Equality



Mothers Against Drunk Driving



The Climate Movement



Black Lives Matter

WHY PERSUASION?

RALLY sought to understand how might we deepen our knowledge of what social sciences can teach us about persuasion to inform our work, share with clients and teach within our industry?

We began with persuasion because it is core to all the work we do as an advocacy firm.





CHALLENGE

How might we leverage what the social sciences understand about persuasion to enrich the field of advocacy?

METHODOLOGY



- Partnered with **Dr. Nichole Argo**, a social psychologist who works at the intersection of science and practice
- Her work on intergroup dynamics has been published in leading journals; co-author of “The State of Belonging in America”
- Founder and Co-Director of the Needham Resilience Network (NRN)



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History & Overview



What Social Science Can Teach Us



Discussion - Marriage Equality Case Study



RATIONALITY
& THE BRAIN

EMOTIONS
& THE BRAIN

SOCIAL IDENTITY
& THE BRAIN

HISTORY & OVERVIEW

RATIONALITY & THE BRAIN

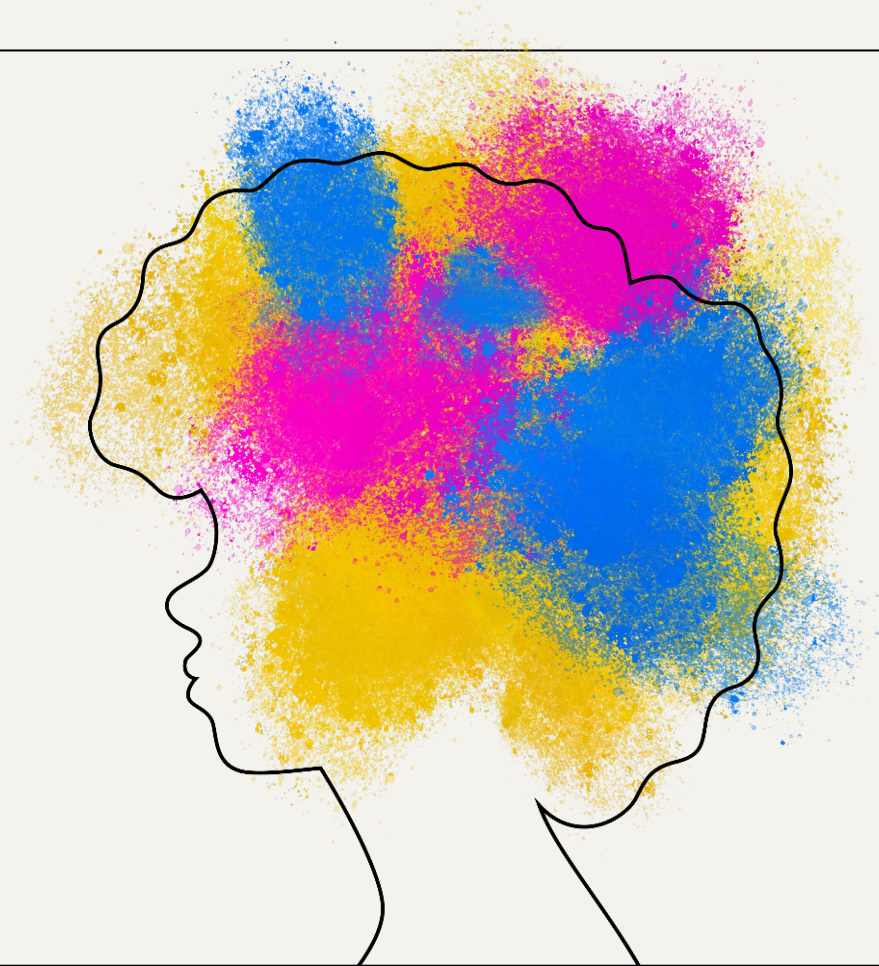
Up until mid-20th century, social scientists saw individuals as “rational actors”—

**logical, selfinterested
and calculating
decision makers**



EMOTIONS & THE BRAIN

By the 21st century, scientists understood that **emotions can prompt and shape beliefs** and that **emotion informs rationality itself**.



SOCIAL IDENTITY & THE BRAIN

Now, we understand
that **social context and
social identity shapes
decision-making.**





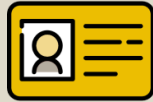
WHAT SOCIAL SCIENCE CAN TEACH US

PERSUASION + ADVOCACY

Applying the science of persuasion



Emotions >
facts



Audience
identity



Norm
pressure



Sacred
values



Social
currency



Storytelling +
engagement



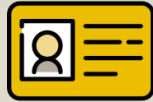
Find the right
emotion

PERSUASION + ADVOCACY

Applying the science of persuasion



Emotions >
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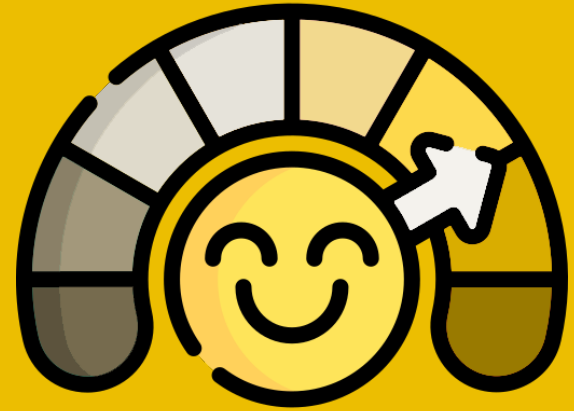


RALLYISM

Facts Don't Persuade

PRINCIPLE #1

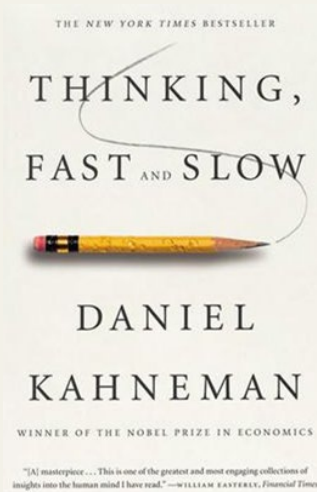
Our Brains Privilege EMOTIONS OVER FACT



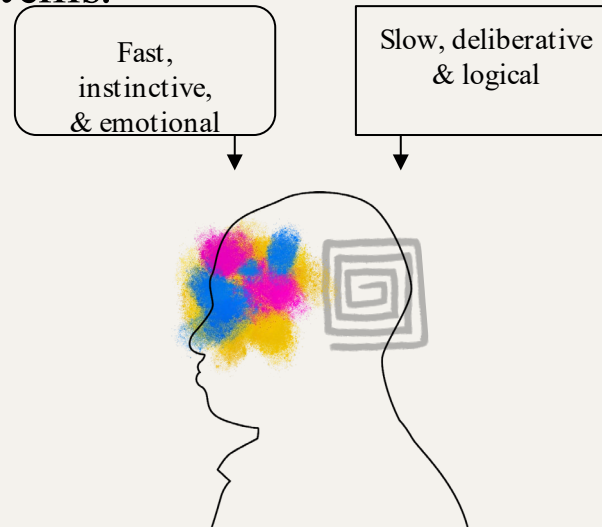


Our Brains Privilege
Emotions Over Facts

HOW OUR BRAINS PROCESS INFORMATION



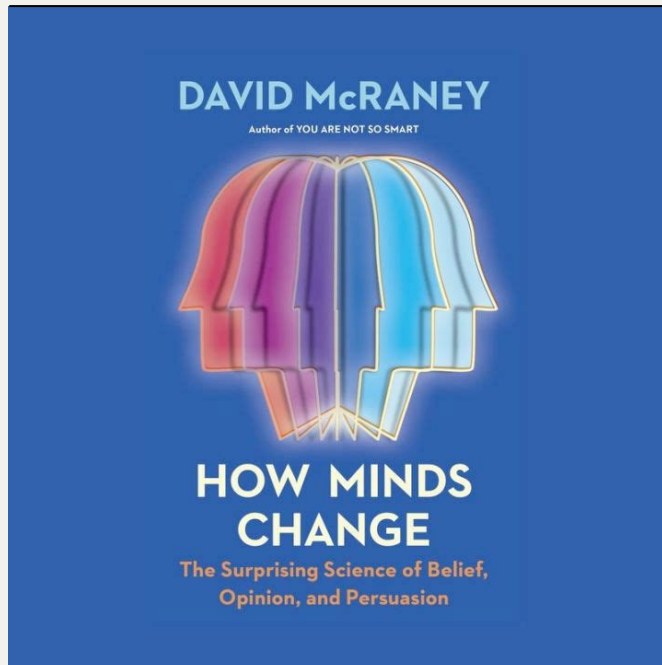
Our brains function with two
systems.



Human judgement is dominated by
emotional responses.



HOW MINDS CHANGE



“

The only way to change someone's mind is by **making them change their own mind**

They must analyze relevant experiences from their own lives that they have never considered before...”



HOW BRAINS USE SHORTCUTS



Framing Effect Theory is a cognitive bias, introduced by psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky

The Framing Effect Theory posits that **it's not what you say, but how you say it** that matters.

A common shortcut: **favoring something framed as positive, versus negative**. We are more concerned about avoiding loss than an equivalent gain.

PERSUASION + ADVOCACY

Applying the science of persuasion



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emotion

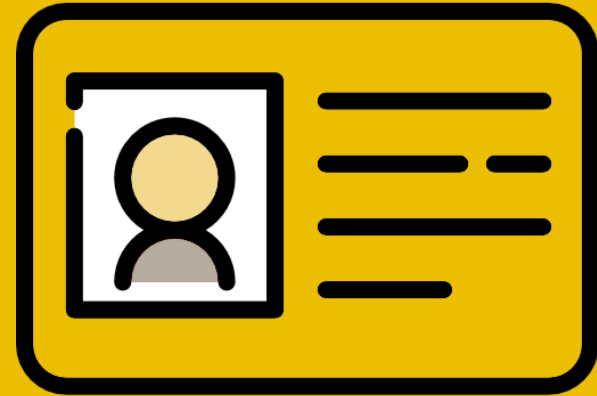


RALLYISM

Meet Our Audience Where They Are

PRINCIPLE #2

SPEAK TO OUR AUDIENCE'S IDENTITY





EXPLAINED



When our sense of social identity is active, **our individual perceptions, emotions and behaviors change**

We tend to:

- Favor our own group members over others;
- See our own group members as more human;
- Perceive events and groups around us through our social identity;
- Follow the norms of our social group more than our own individual beliefs.

PERSUASION + ADVOCACY

Applying the science of persuasion



Emotions >
facts



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Storytelling +
engagement



Find the right
emotion



RALLYISM

*Peer*Pressure Works

PRINCIPLE #3

AND SO DOES *NORM* PRESSURE





Don't Forget Norm
Pressure

WAYS TO REINFORCE, SHIFT OR CREATE NORMS



Humans **follow the norms of our social group** more than their own individual beliefs or attitudes.

Norms are ways for us to connect with our social group, **to feel that we belong.**

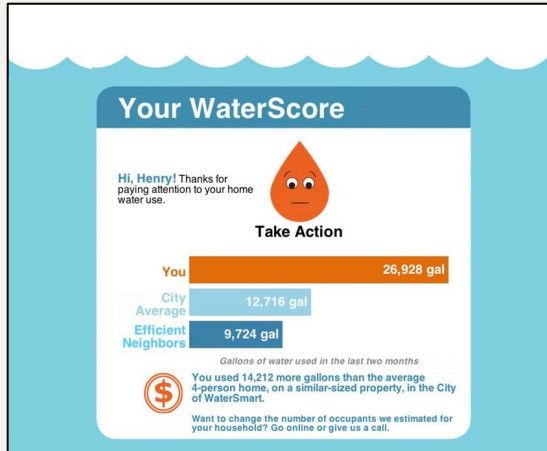
But telling people not to engage in a negative action can promote that negative action.



Don't Forget Norm
Pressure

EXAMPLES

CALIFORNIA NEIGHBORHOOD WATER DATA CAMPAIGN



Sharing information about the
group's opinions and behavior.

NFL STAR PROMOTES COVID VACCINE



Leveraging an influential **individual** to
shape perceptions of norms.

SCOTUS DECISION ON MARRIAGE EQUALITY



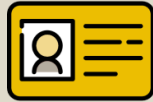
Shifting norms through credible
sources and **institutions**.

PERSUASION + ADVOCACY

Applying the science of persuasion



Emotions >
facts



Audience
identity



Norm
pressure



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Social
currency



Storytelling +
engagement



Find the right
emotion



RALLYISM

Speak to Existing Values

PRINCIPLE #4

CONNECT TO SHARED VALUES





NAVIGATING SACRED VALUES



Sacred values are “**moral rules**” that our brains process as **obligations, rather than choices**

You can't challenge the sacred value. You can:

- Show the sacred value has shifted within the social group;
- Shift priority from one sacred value to another.

PERSUASION + ADVOCACY

Applying the science of persuasion



Emotions >
facts



Audience
identity



Norm
pressure



Sacred
values



Social
currency



Storytelling +
engagement



Find the right
emotion



RALLYISM

The Messenger Matters

PRINCIPLE #5

SOCIAL CURRENCY MATTERS





EXPLAINED



Individuals with disproportionate **influence within specified social identity group** are critical in shaping and shifting norms.

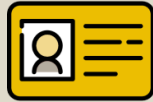
These individuals can even be fictional — especially if prototypical of that group.

PERSUASION + ADVOCACY

Applying the science of persuasion



Emotions > facts



Audience identity



Norm pressure



Sacred values



Social currency



Storytelling + engagement



Find the right emotion



RALLYISM

Storytelling as Strategy

PRINCIPLE #6

STORYTELLING NEEDS ENGAGEMENT





EXPLAINED



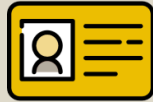
Storytelling can increase empathy and mutual understanding, set new norms, and provide motivation for change. But **storytelling alone is insufficient.**

PERSUASION + ADVOCACY

Applying the science of persuasion



Emotions >
facts



Audience
identity



Norm
pressure



Sacred
values



Social
currency



Storytelling +
engagement



Find the right
emotion

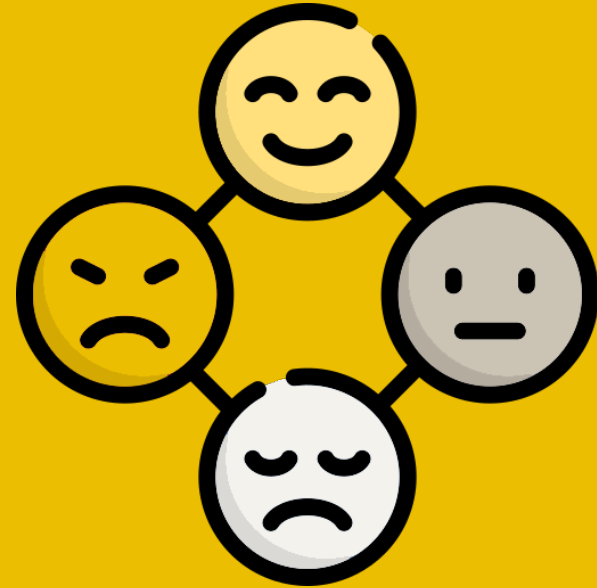


RALLYISM

Make It Emotional

PRINCIPLE #7

FIND THE RIGHT EMOTIO N





EXPLAINED



Emotions can prompt and shape beliefs
as much as they are shaped by them.

But no one emotion works for everyone
in every situation.

Find the right emotion .



Find the Right
Emotion

EXPLAINED



Hope=
Effective



Sadness
Worse Perceived
Outcomes



Hate & Moral Outrage=
Contagious



Fear=
Grabs Attention, but
Paralyzing



Anger=
Mobilizing but Leads to Fatigue



Happiness=
Better Perceived
Outcomes



Empathy=
Potential Backfire



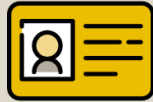
DISCUSSION

PERSUASION + ADVOCACY

Applying the science of persuasion



Emotions >
facts



Audience
identity



Norm
pressure



Sacred
values



Social
currency



Storytelling +
engagement



Find the right
emotion



EMOTIONS > FACTS





EMOTIONS > FACTS



“For decades, the gay rights movement emphasized the countless rights and benefits that came with marriage. But that legal frame, including the word ‘rights,’ didn’t work.

So we worked very hard to get our own team, our partners, the media, and politicians to shift to emphasizing that particular authentic message, the one this next swath of potential supporters needed to hear. That was the famous shift from benefits to love. And that shift did indeed build public support from about 53% in 2010 to 63% by 2015, not because what we had done before didn’t work, but because it wasn’t what the next people needed to hear...”

- Evan Wolfson, Executive Director, Freedom to Marry



Speak to Audience's Identity

AUDIENCE IDENTITY



New Arkansas Dads: 'Love Conquers All'

STEPHEN & EDDIE INMAN-CRAWLEY • HOT SPRINGS, AR



I Am a Parent, We Are a Family

CARI SEARCY & KIM MCKEAND • MOBILE, AL



Parents



Speak to Audience's Identity

AUDIENCE IDENTITY



Military Couple Hopes For Marriage Back Home

TIMOTHY & JOSEPH KLIPP-LOCKHART • ALEXANDRIA, VA



Veterans



Sister of Utah Couple: Faith, Family and the Freedom to Marry

SHANA ELMER • SPANISH FORK, UT



Faith Community



Don't Forget Norm Pressure

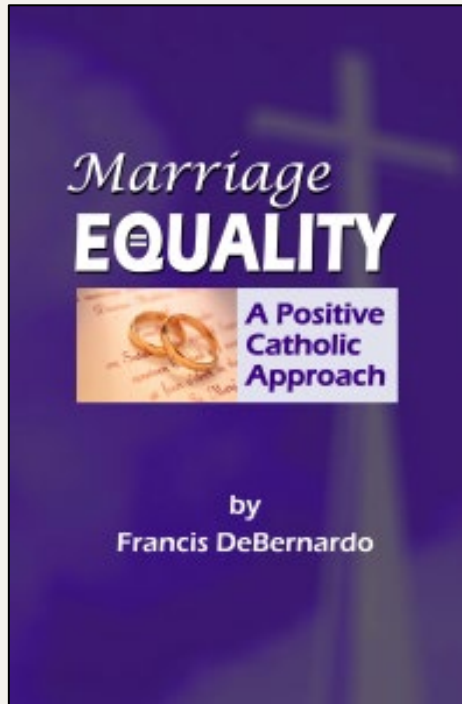
REINFORCING A NORM OF ACCEPTANCE





Don't Forget Norm Pressure

ESTABLISHING A NEW NORM IN THE FAITH COMMUNITY



FREEDOM
TO MARRY

Presbyterian church includes same-sex couples in definition of marriage

MARCH 18, 2015

Austin American-Statesman
SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1871

Austin church won't hold weddings until it can marry same-sex couples

Elizabeth Findell, Eric Webb efindell@statesman.com

Published 12:01 a.m. CT Sept. 30, 2017 | Updated 2:10 p.m. CT Sept. 25, 2018

ACLU
Wisconsin

WISCONSIN CONGREGATIONS TO PRAY FOR FREEDOM TO MARRY FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES



LEADING WITH LOVE





INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS



“My involvement in this case has generated a certain degree of consternation among conservatives. How could a politically active, lifelong Republican, a veteran of the Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush administrations, challenge the ‘traditional’ definition of marriage and press for an ‘activist’ interpretation of the Constitution to create another ‘new’ constitutional right?”

[...]

Many of my fellow conservatives have an almost knee-jerk hostility toward gay marriage. This does not make sense, because same-sex unions promote the values conservatives prize. Marriage is one of the basic building blocks of our neighborhoods and our nation. [...] The fact that individuals who happen to be gay want to share in this vital social institution is evidence that conservative ideals enjoy widespread acceptance. Conservatives should celebrate this, rather than lament it.”

- Theodore B. Olson



Activism convinced just enough Republicans to support same-sex marriage

LGBTQ conservatives spent decades building a case that enabled the Respect for Marriage Act to pass

8 min



Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Susan Collins (R-Maine), Rob Portman (R-Ohio) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) attend a news conference after the Senate passed the Respect for Marriage Act in Washington on Nov. 29. (Elizabeth Frantz for The Washington Post)



Perspective by Neil J. Young

December 9, 2022 at 6:00 a.m. EST

Republicans Sign Brief in Support of Gay Marriage

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg

Feb. 25, 2013

LOBBYING

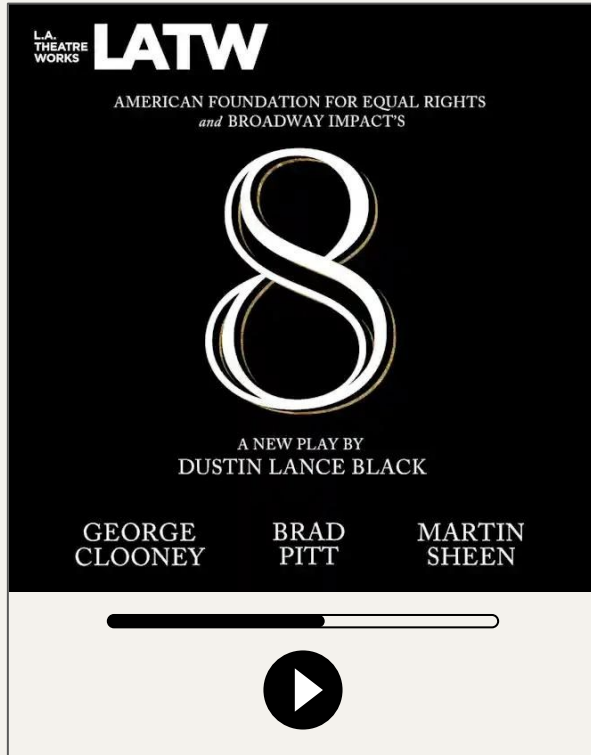
A GOP voice for gay marriage

BY SARAH FERRIS - 07/07/15 6:00 AM ET





STORIES MAKE CONCEPTS TANGIBLE





Find the Right Emotion

WHAT DO YOU SEE?



THANK YOU!

ASK US FOR THE FULL OR CONDENSED
REPORT!

CONTACT INFORMATION

Amy Clark
aclark@wearerally.com



APPENDIX



Speak To Our
Audience's Identity

EXAMPLES

MOMS DEMAND ACTION



Organization appeals to **parental identity** for gun safety.

#CRIPTHEVOTE



Online movement that activated disabled people, **leveraging shared identity** for political impact.

GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation)



Organization focuses on **LGBTQ+ identity**, harnessing advocacy power through shared experiences.



EXAMPLES

H.E. BUTT FOUNDATION SHARED TABLES



Community members join together for a shared meal to **bridge social divides** and discuss the complex realities that shape their city.

STORYCORP ONE SMALL STEP

What happens
when 2 strangers



with opposing
political views

Initiative brings strangers with different political views **together through conversation and connection.**



Find the Right
Emotion

EXAMPLES

COVID VACCINES CAMPAIGN



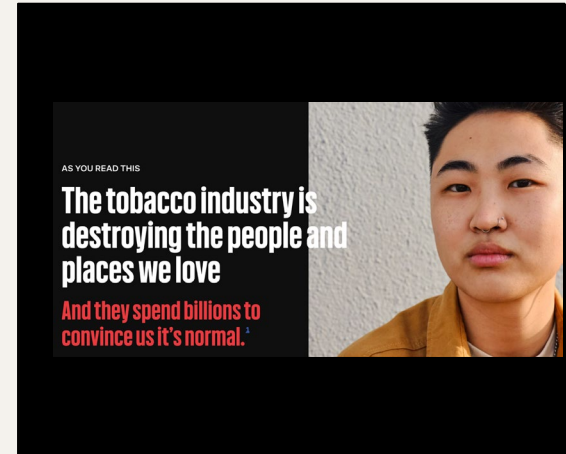
Appeals to emotions of **hope** and **happiness**.

BAY ON THE BRINK



Environmental campaign leveraged **fear**.

ANTI TOBACCO CAMPAIGN



Advertisement uses **moral outrage** to increase mobilization.



EXAMPLES

SHIP IT ZERO AMAZON ACTIVATION



Students age 7-15 held a climate teach-in at Amazon HQ, telling the story of the impacts of shipping pollution.

THE MARCH IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE



Virtual reality experience and exhibit invites visitors to experience Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech.



EXAMPLES

MEN IN #METOO MOVEMENT

Benjamin Law
@mrbenjaminlaw

Guys, it's our turn.

After yesterday's endless [#MeToo](#) stories of women being abused, assaulted and harassed, today we say [#HowWillChange](#).

9:15 PM · Oct 16, 2017

269 2,501 6,714

Men speaking up about sexual assault has **outsized impact among men.**

BARBIE ANTRACISM VLOG



Barbie has strong **social currency among young girls.**

CHINOOK JUSTICE CAMPAIGN



Campaign mobilized likely advocates through **influencer popular among indigenous allies.**



EXAMPLES

AIDS ADVOCACY ACT UP



Appealing to the **fast, instinctive, and emotional** part of our brains.

#METOO MOVEMENT



Changing minds by helping people **unpack** their own life experiences.

"PRO LIFE"



Leveraging cognitive shortcuts that favor things **framed positively**.



Connect to
Shared Values

EXAMPLES

WE BELIEVE



Campaign frames book bans and educational gag orders as **infringement on freedom.**

COVID-19 VACCINES



Messaging leaned into sacred value of **protecting life.**

INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT



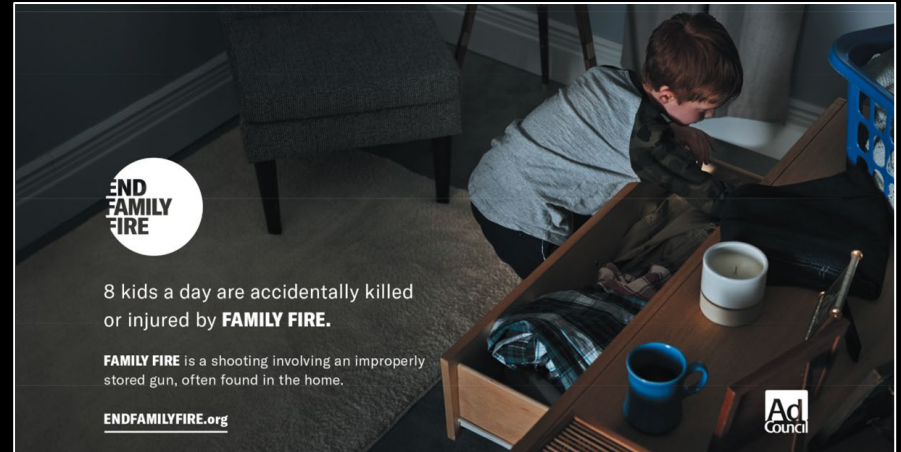
Campaign unites audiences via shared value of **family preservation.**

SAME ISSUE, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Based on today's learning, which ad is most effective?



A



B

SAME ISSUE, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Based on today's learning, which ad is most effective?



A



B

SAME ISSUE, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Based on today's learning, what principles are at play here?



A



B



EXAMPLE



X González's "We Call BS" emotionally **moving speech** after the Parkland High School shooting **mobilized allies** to take action on gun violence with March For Our Lives.



Norm Forget
Norm Pressure

EXAMPLE

 **Elmo**
@elmo · Follow

Elmo is just checking in! How is everybody doing?

7:46 AM · Jan 29, 2024

144.7K Likes · Reply · Copy link

[Read 18K replies](#)

 **Maeroc (Taylor's Version)** · Paramore · Jan 29 ...
Elmo we are tired
26 Comments · 1.5K Retweets · 54K Likes · 1.8M Views

 **woshingo** · @Woshingo · Jan 29 ...
I'm at my lowest. Thanks for asking.
88 Comments · 414 Retweets · 15K Likes · 901K Views

 **Steven** · @StevenMcinerney · Jan 29 ...
The world is burning around us, Elmo.

 **Mahmoud Mosalam** · @mosa1am · 4h ...
Kind of drained, but the fact that you asked makes one wanna cry 🥺🥺

 **TTVZeusGaming** · @TTVZeusGaming · 7h ...
I'm struggling mentally. But thanks for checking in 🙌

 **Elmo**
@elmo · Follow

Wow! Elmo is glad he asked! Elmo learned that it is important to ask a friend how they are doing. Elmo will check in again soon, friends! Elmo loves you. ❤️
[#EmotionalWellBeing](#)



9:10 AM · Jan 30, 2024

397.6K Likes · Reply · Copy link

[Read 4.7K replies](#)

Elmo's viral tweet **reinforced the norm** of checking in with one another and openly talking about mental health.



Don't Forget
Norm Pressure

EXAMPLE



This public service announcement is aimed at **shifting norms** of men to speak up when they hear other men victim blame survivors and trivialize sexual assault.

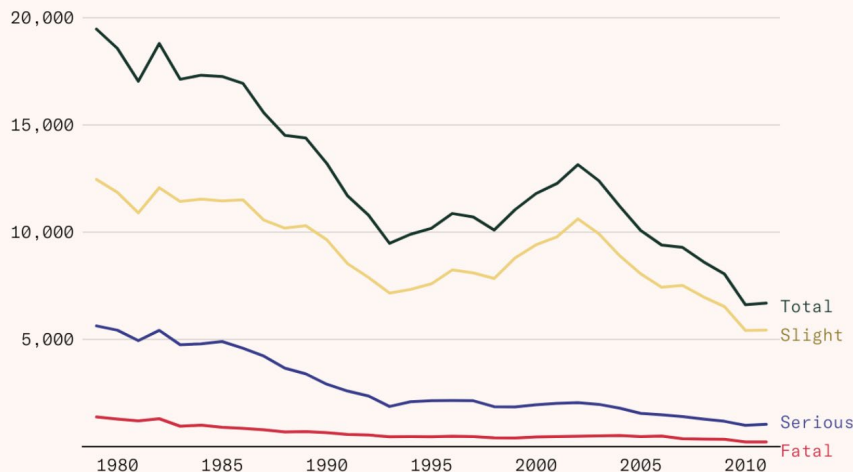


Don't Forget
Norm Pressure

EXAMPLE

Drunk driving accidents in Great Britain

The estimated number of reported drunk driving accidents



*Source: Bowman, Nick. "How the war on drunk driving was won." Works in Progress. 17th May, 2024.

"...above all, driving while drunk has become stigmatized.

This stigma didn't come from nowhere. Governments across the Western world, along with many civil society organizations, engaged in campaigns about the risks of drunk driving. And they didn't just talk. Tens of thousands of people faced criminal sanctions, and many were even put in jail.

Two underappreciated ideas stick out from this experience. First, deterrence works: incentives matter to offenders much more than many scholars found initially plausible. Second, the long-run impact that successful criminal justice interventions have is not primarily in rehabilitation, incapacitation, or even deterrence, *but in altering the social norms around acceptable behavior.*



EXAMPLE



This ad for the 30x30 conservation initiative appeals to Americans' **sense of shared ownership and pride over their American lands**



EXAMPLE



@Monsieur_Steve_ was an ideal influencer for an education campaign targeting teachers because, as teacher himself providing resources to an audience of teachers, he has **strong social currency** among the campaign's core audience.



EXAMPLES



When Fortnite hosted an immersive Alzheimer's simulator on the platform to raise awareness among Gen Z gamers, it exemplified a powerful **engagement technique** to accompany storytelling.



Speak to
Audience's Identity

EXAMPLES

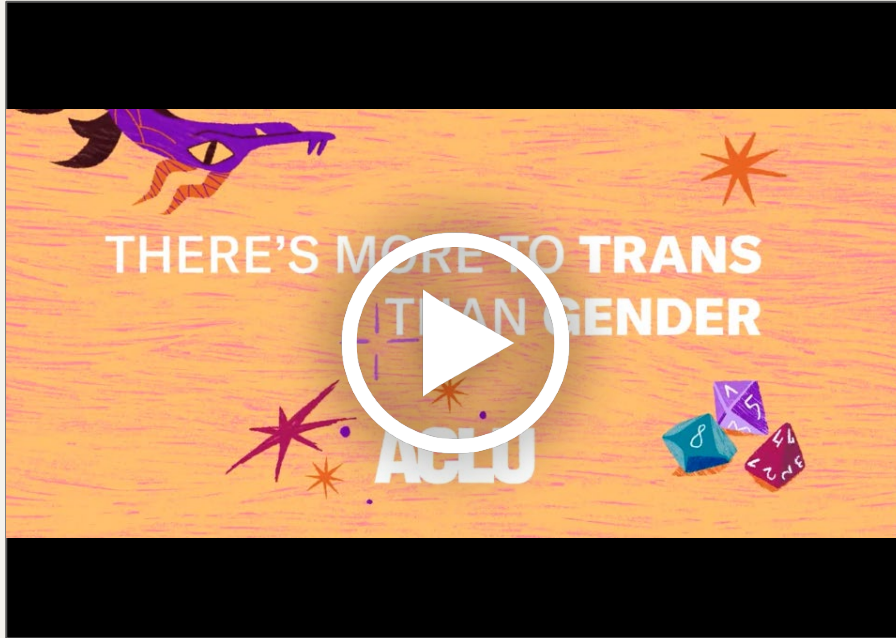


Speaking to faith communities to connect climate action with religious rituals and holidays.

Image credit (left to right): Dayenu, Catholic Climate Covenant, and Wisconsin Green Muslims



EXAMPLE



Video illustrates the transgender experience, exuding **joy**.



#MeToo



The Movement to End Apartheid



The Fight for 15



The Fight Against Big Tobacco



Women's Suffrage